



ISSUES IN PREVENTION

Community Colleges—Prevention Challenges

Prevention at Community Colleges

Community colleges play an important role in the nation's system of postsecondary education. According to the [American Association of Community Colleges](#) (AACC), with an enrollment of 12.4 million students in 1,167 public and independent community colleges, their students represent 44 percent of the college student population nationwide. AACC describes community colleges as "... an American invention that put publicly funded higher education at close-to-home facilities, beginning nearly 100 years ago with Joliet Junior College. ... Community colleges are community-based institutions of higher education that serve all segments of society through an open-access admissions." Recognizing the importance of community colleges in preparing Americans for careers in current and emerging industries, [the Obama administration](#) has made them an integral component of its strategy to kick-start the economy.

While problems related to alcohol, other drugs, and violence at community colleges have not been the focus of very much research, preliminary findings from a three-year study on college alcohol and drug prevention systems by researchers at the [University of Minnesota's Alcohol Epidemiology Program](#) found that 42 percent of administrators at 106 two-year community and technical colleges across the nation rated student drinking as a "major or moderate problem." The survey results (not yet published) were presented in Washington,

D.C., on April 26–27, 2010, at the U.S. Department of Education's Higher Education Center for Alcohol, Drug Abuse, and Violence Prevention's meeting on emerging issues at community colleges. Other findings from the survey include:

- Few two-year colleges require alcohol education for their students.
- Sixty-one percent of two-year colleges prohibit alcohol use on campus and 79 percent ban alcohol ads on campus.
- Approximately one-third of two-year colleges reported that their alcohol intervention and treatment services meet the needs of their students, and the cost of programs was the most common barrier reported to offering treatment services (similar responses were seen among four-year colleges).

According to the [National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism](#), community college students drink less heavily than do students attending four-year colleges and universities.

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There are several possible explanations for this difference. First, community college students tend to be older, and they more often work full-time, have children, or live with their parents. In addition, community colleges are less likely to have fraternities and sororities or large intercollegiate athletics programs, which are features of college life that are also known to increase the likelihood of alcohol and other drug problems on campus.

A 2005 study of drinking behavior by students at a Florida community college that was published in the *Journal of American College Health* (Vol. 54, No. 3) found a binge-drinking rate of 25 percent. Binge drinking was defined as five or more drinks for men and four or more drinks for women in one sitting. The researchers point out that, although this rate is “high in absolute terms, it is lower than national estimates for traditional four-year students, which range from 34 percent to 47 percent, depending on the college survey.” They attribute this lower rate, at least in part, to demographic differences between community and traditional college students. However, for students in the study who were 18 to 21 years old (the typical age for students in traditional institutions), the binge-drinking rate was 33 percent, which was closer to estimates obtained in national surveys of traditional college students.

While there are a number of similarities among community colleges and four-year colleges and universities, especially with commuter campuses, participants at the emerging issues meeting pointed out that there are also a number of differences. For example, they said that one of the main distinguishing factors between two- and four-year colleges is the absence of student residential facilities. As a result, although some community colleges do have residence halls, those campuses without such facilities have little knowledge of student behavior off campus, where the vast majority of their time is spent and where most problems related to alcohol and other drug use and violence occur.

Unlike four-year colleges and universities, which rely on a formal admissions process, community colleges are open to all, regardless of prior

academic achievements. This results in a very diverse student body, with greater numbers of returning and older students, and veterans, as well as students in recovery from alcoholism or drug addiction. In addition, unlike students on four-year campuses, according to AACC, the majority of community college students are enrolled part-time (60 percent). According to the meeting participants, these characteristics have implications for implementing health and safety programming at community colleges.

Participants at the April meeting identified a number of alcohol, other drug, and violence problems and prevention issues at community colleges. Consistent with the University of Minnesota survey, they agreed that the vast majority of disciplinary problems stem from alcohol use. In addition, the predominance of part-time and adjunct faculty at community colleges leads to disconnectedness among faculty and high staff turnover rates. These characteristics result in challenges for prevention staff in training faculty to refer students experiencing problems to appropriate services.

At the emerging issues meeting, Susan Quinn, director of Student Health Services at Santa Rosa Junior College (California), pointed out that there are few regularly collected systematic national surveys about alcohol- and other drug-related behaviors and consequences among community college students. This lack of data may contribute to a perception on the part of the general public that alcohol, other drugs, and violence are not problems at community colleges. A National College Health Assessment survey done at 13 California community colleges in 2007 suggests, though, that despite overall lower rates of alcohol use, the negative consequences of drinking and experience of violence are higher in this population than in students at four-year IHEs. More studies within the community college population nationally are needed to support efforts to apply the most effective interventions in this growing sector of higher education.

Mark Wolfson, professor in the Department of Social Sciences and Health Policy at Wake Forest

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University School of Medicine in Winston-Salem, N.C., underscored the need for more research regarding community college alcohol, other drug, and violence issues, especially in light of their [increasing enrollment](#). According to Wolfson, the community college research field would benefit from a national survey similar to those that have been conducted at four-year colleges and more collaboration between researchers and staff at community colleges.

“With the administration’s emphasis on community colleges, now is the time to learn more about alcohol and drug problems among their students in order to develop effective prevention strategies,” said Wolfson.

The Obama administration has called for an additional 5 million community college graduates by 2020 and announced new initiatives to raise the graduation rate. Meeting participants see this emphasis on retention as a wedge issue. It can help community colleges recognize the importance of providing alcohol and other drug prevention and intervention services to keep students enrolled and it can detract from such services by placing more of the limited community college resources into academic counseling. Diane Glaser, coordinator of student health services at Allan Hancock College in Santa Maria, Calif., said, “Student development–focused counseling needs advocacy in the face of widespread denial about the role that alcohol and other drug use can play when it comes to academic problems and dropping out.”

Editor’s Note: For more information on the Obama administration’s community college initiative, go to <http://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/education/higher-education/building-american-skills-through-community-colleges>.

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Q&A With William Auvenshine

William R. Auvenshine is the 17th sitting president at Clarendon College, a community college that is the Texas Panhandle’s oldest college. Auvenshine began his career in higher education as dean of student services at Ranger Junior College (Early, Texas), where he served from 1971 to 1984. He then served 20 years as president of Hill College in Hillsboro (Texas) until 2004. Most recently, Auvenshine served as interim president at Galveston College in Galveston, Texas. Auvenshine has served on numerous committees for the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and the Southern Association of Schools and Colleges. He has also served as president of the Texas Community College Association and served at other civic and education organizations. He was an invited participant at the community college emerging issues meeting convened by the Higher Education Center for Alcohol, Drug Abuse, and Violence Prevention.

Q: After almost four decades working at community colleges, what changes have you seen over the years, especially when it comes to problems related to alcohol and other drug abuse and violence?

A: In the 1970s, when the age of majority dropped from 21 to 18, colleges could no longer act *in loco parentis*—or act as a parent—when it came to overseeing student behavior. Previously, colleges had a wide range of control over students in the matters of discipline and drug and alcohol abuse. When we lost that, I thought my world had come to an end as a dean of students back in those days. Of course, since then we have developed policies that have taken the place of *in loco parentis*. Then in 1998, Congress passed the Higher Education Amendments, which permits colleges to inform parents of students under age 21 if they violate the college’s drug and alcohol policies. A number of colleges, including the college where I am presently the CEO, adopted policies to use this parental notification option. It has been very effective on my campus.

Of course, students object to this policy. When they reach 18—the age of majority—then they
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think they are adults and can make adult decisions, certainly when it comes to drinking. But the minimum legal drinking age is still 21, so even though they have reached the age of majority they are breaking a law if they buy or use alcohol [before age 21].

Q: Do you notify parents if you determine that your students have violated the drinking laws off campus if you find out about it?

A: We do if they live in one of our dormitories. The problem with community colleges across the nation is that the vast majority of the students are commuters. It is much more difficult for the administration to learn about problems that occur off campus. As my school is in a small rural community, we know if students go to the lake and drink. And yes, we do notify the parents if they live in the dorm and the problem occurs off campus. The students are still under our oversight.

Q: Have you seen increases in student alcohol and other drug use over the years? Or do you think it has remained relatively stable among community colleges?

A: Alcohol has always been a problem. I have seen a much greater use of drugs through the years. However, alcohol was around even back in the 1950s when I was a student. A number of studies have focused on student drinking and drug use. A 1989 study by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching indicated that 67 percent of college and university presidents rated alcohol abuse to be a “moderate” or “major” problem on their campus. In 1993, a Harvard study revealed that 44 percent of the students engaged in binge drinking two weeks before the survey. In a 2007 study, 41 percent of the college students in Texas reported risky drinking behavior. In 2008, the Partnership for a Drug-Free America reported on the problems of hard drugs on campus. Marijuana has been around for a long time but hard drugs are a new experience for me.

Q: What are some of the factors that contribute to alcohol and other drug use among community college students?

A: Some community colleges have dormitories and some are mainly commuter schools. They present different problems. But regardless of whether it is a residential or commuter college, peer pressure is the largest single indicator. It is almost a rite of passage that students experience the keg party. Being away from home for the first time or getting out of parental supervision certainly is a factor.

Q: There are some surveys that seem to indicate that community college students report fewer problems related to alcohol use and are not drinking at quite the same level as their counterparts in four-year colleges. Do you think there are reasons that would account for that disparity?

A: I think that that is simply an oversight. Community college CEOs are not addressing the problem. The problems occur off campus and since so many community college students are commuters we do not see the problems. We are not getting good data on community college students.

Q: Are there some environmental factors that lead to more problems on certain campuses?

A: At community colleges with dormitories students are living in an environment that they have not been accustomed to. They are 18 years old and living away from their parents for the first time, which is a very strong influence on students. Some schools are known as party schools, and students go there expecting to get into the drug and alcohol scene. Students also get mixed messages from the community and sometimes from the school itself. Clarendon (community) College is in a rural community so we do not have the constant bombardment from advertising that you might get in a metropolitan area. But students who constantly see messages associating the good life with alcohol are bound to be influenced. And of course the alcohol beverage companies spend millions in advertising. In fact, one of the colleges we play in competition baseball has accepted a million dollar gift from Coors to build its baseball

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field. We have a rodeo program and the tobacco companies will give us nice endowments and stipends if we agree to advertise their products, but we do not accept their money.

Q: You mentioned the role of athletics at the emerging issues meeting. Most people do not think of community colleges as having strong athletics programs. What role do they play when it comes to alcohol and other drug problems?

A: Athletics is very strong in Texas. We are in the Sun Belt where we have good weather so outdoor sports are very attractive. I believe that athletics is one way that we can change environments to reduce the problems. We can have more planned student activities on the campus. We can have ways to recreate physically, such as participation in basketball, tennis, baseball, softball, and rodeo. Those are activities that are supervised by coaches, who have a tremendous influence over student athletes. We do not tolerate alcohol or drug abuse in any of our programs.

Q: What are some of the greatest challenges community colleges face in implementing alcohol and other drug abuse and violence prevention programs?

A: The greatest challenge is education. We must recognize that we have a problem. So many CEOs do not understand that it is hurting their pocketbooks. Community colleges get appropriations from state legislatures based on enrollment. If we are losing enrollments related to drug and alcohol abuse then we need to develop programs to keep those kids in school.

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Chancellor's Initiative at the University of Wisconsin-Stout

In response to six alcohol-related student deaths over the last two years at the University of Wisconsin-Stout, Chancellor Charles W. Sorensen decided the time had come to take stronger steps to address alcohol abuse on and around the campus.

On March 30, 2010, Sorensen distributed a memo to the entire campus announcing that the university would increase the number of classes held on Fridays in order to discourage Thursday drinking; empower the dean of students to deal more harshly with underage drinking and those who facilitate it, and other alcohol-related offenses; and work more closely with local law enforcement to curb availability of alcohol to underage students.

“We also have seen other effects of alcohol abuse by our students, including serious injuries to themselves or others (including suicide), sexual assault, careless use of smoking materials resulting in fire, drunken driving and felony criminal charges,” Sorensen wrote in his memo outlining the new measures

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Alcohol Marketing in the Digital Age

According to the report [*Alcohol Marketing in the Digital Age*](#), alcohol companies are increasingly using the latest new media technologies, such as cell phones, social networking sites, YouTube, and other features of the expanding digital media, to reach young drinkers.

The researchers say that “digital marketing is by its nature engaging . . . and therefore the consequences of interacting with products and brands in cyberspace might be even more profound than the known risks of exposure to traditional alcohol marketing. Public health advocates and governments are concerned and have been tracking these developments, but there hasn’t been the kind of intense public debate about whether the new techniques are acceptable, particularly when the digital realm is so heavily trafficked by young people.”

One of the report’s recommendations is a call for the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and state attorneys general to investigate the data collection,

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online profiling, and online targeting practices of alcohol beverage companies, including social media data-mining technologies. “The FTC and other regulators need to determine whether alcohol beverage ad targeting is reaching specific young people and their networks, providing a complete picture of the industry’s online data collection practices—including whether their privacy policies are accurate. This study should include an examination of Facebook, Google, and YouTube.”

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Higher Education Center Resources

Case Studies

- [Bloomington Normal Community Campus Committee: Bloomington Normal Community Campus](#)
- [Finger Lakes Community College: Campus Community Coalition](#)

Publications

- [Community College Presidents’ Role in Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Prevention](#) (2006)
- [Engaging the Nation’s Community Colleges as Prevention Partners](#) (2003)
- [Prevention Challenges at Community Colleges](#) (1998)

Web Page

- [Prevention at Community Colleges](#)

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